



Episode 41: An Interview with Susanna Klein

Christine Goodner ([00:00](#)):

Welcome everyone. I'm excited today to be talking to Susanna Klein. And Susanna, I would hope you could just start by telling us a bit about who you are and what you do in the world of music.

Susanna Klein ([00:10](#)):

Sure. It's great to be here, by the way. Thank you so much for inviting me. I'm a violinist sort of primarily. I'm a professor violin at Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond. But the other thing that I'm sort of known for is, being a bit of a researcher in the field of practice psychology. I'm not a psychologist. I just happen to be the person who's, I guess, one of the people who's most interested in that. And so I do a lot of, writing, blogging, YouTubing, Instagramming, sort of around that subject. I'm slowly trying to write a book is the, is the background, but that's a bigger project.

Christine Goodner ([00:49](#)):

Yes, I hear you there. <laugh>, I have heard you talk before about how, as you were growing up, you had sort of a mix of a sports influence plus music influence and how that got you interested in this. I'd love if you could tell people a bit about that.

Susanna Klein ([01:01](#)):

Yeah, so in high school I was quite serious about sports and I'll say only semi-serious about music. I practiced, but not I wasn't what you would call a rigorous practicer. And the summer, let's see, the summer before my senior year in high school, I got a letter in the mail <laugh>, that was like a surprise letter. You've gotten a half scholarship, you know, for, um, tuition and room and board at Canon Music Camp because you went to Maryland, Allstate. So they must have bought a mailing list and just started handing out scholarships. So I went to the camp and as part of the camp, I had a side by side experience with the North Carolina Symphony. And, you know, just like that in an instant, in a rehearsal, it was like I was in, I call it I was infected with music, you know, like I liked music before, but I didn't really have the virus and then I got the virus.

Susanna Klein ([01:53](#)):

And so I had this very late sort of pivot towards wanting to pursue music. Then there's a whole fast forward, you know, went to, got into the college actually where I now teach. I've sort of come full circle, went to graduate school, blah, blah, blah, got several jobs, et cetera, et cetera. Ended up years later after repeated playing injuries ended up in higher ed, and then all the sports stuff I had actually forgotten about. Um, I just really never thought about, you know, sports related to music. But then when VCU went to the final four in, uh, when was it, 2011, I started following their coach pretty seriously. Shaka smart, who's, he's no longer there, but he had a minor in psychology and a lot of work that he did with his players. I was following very closely and I was like, why don't we do that in music?

Susanna Klein ([02:42](#)):

You know, that's, that makes so much sense. And so I, I wrote a grant application that was like a teaching application for innovations in teaching, and that allowed me to buy some equipment and some books and do all sorts of research. And that's how I sort of reconnected then with sports, but through the lens of sports psychology primarily. And that kind of unfolded a whole other series of events of me, you know, actually quite honestly, stealing a lot from sports and then also being reminded about things in my own sports background that I did when I was younger. My coaches had me do, but I didn't realize why. So, you know, sports psychology is a, well-established discipline. It's, I think the first, uh, sports psychology like lab or institute was formed in 1931. So there's a long, rich, very rich track record of, you know, coaching individuals in psychological terms.

Susanna Klein ([03:39](#)):

And, and because like music, you know, it's a really hard discipline. It's very competitive, just like music. Uh, it takes daily practice, right? Sometimes it's boring. There are a lot of parallels that we can learn from, and there's a lot of research that we can draw upon to make our own practice or practice coaching or prac or teaching journey, right? More, uh, more positive, not just more impactful. I started out looking just for excellence. I just want my players at school to be better. That's how it started. But where I ended up was like, okay, that's actually secondary to, I want them to not hate this. If we can figure out how for them not to hate it, then a natural result is of course that they will get better more quickly.

Christine Goodner ([04:21](#)):

I love that you say that because I think a lot of people who listen to this podcast either teach or parent or support a young musician in their lives, and I think that's a big part of the beginning process is how do we get them to enjoy this? Because once they're willing to do it each day and they like the process for whatever reason, at first, then we can get more of the results maybe that we, we want to see out of it.

Susanna Klein ([04:43](#)):

Yeah. And there's some internal resistance, I think, in all of us. You know, parents, teachers, professional musicians. I think there's some internal resistance to that joy piece because we think, you know, most of us grew up practicing somewhat miserably, and so we just kind of pass that forward and we think, well, difficult work is gonna require sacrifice, and you know, there's this whole sort of narrative around it. But I really think we know so much more about human nature now, and the stories that we tell ourselves and that we tell our students and our kids are important, you know? And I think for myself, I think I made myself miserable because I was thoroughly convinced that that was the best way. It was. It was almost strategic rather than accidental. If, you know, if I just really think that I suck, then I will practice more. And if I will practice more, then I won't suck anymore, and then I'll be happy. You know, I've come to, uh, rewind on all of that in myself through the lens of my students. They're, they're really, um,

they're really the ones who have taught me essentially the value of, cultivating joy or cultivating a more positive mindset.

Christine Goodner ([05:54](#)):

I think that's important too, because I hear a lot talk in education spaces about this, it gets harder in our modern society or more counter-cultural to start an instrument and study it because there's a lot of dabbling in many things, or just the daily consistency of it is so different than a lot of other activities. Mm-Hmm. <affirmative>. And so I think if we don't cultivate that joy or some part of this is for the child that they like, it's, you know, why would we choose to do that <laugh>

Susanna Klein ([06:20](#)):

And, and teach them to cultivate that joy, right? Because if you can cultivate that within yourself, it doesn't matter what discipline you're in or you, you know what task you have in front of you, um, you will do it more readily, <laugh> more easily. You will feel better about yourself. And, and that's, that's always a good thing. And I don't think that's, that's not something most kids get at school. Let's, let's talk about how to work on your inner dialogue or your inner process. You know, what do we do when things get tough? There is a narrative in the culture. Well then you just, you just deal with it. You just suck it up, you know? right. And I think there are truly more efficient ways to go about it and more powerful ways.

Christine Goodner ([07:00](#)):

And I think if we're a parent or caregiver working with a child long-term in the practice room and helping them, or we're a teacher, you know, some of us work with the same students many years. We have a unique perspective, like you're saying, where we get to speak into some of those things.

Susanna Klein ([07:12](#)):

Yes. Very powerful time. That one-on-one time. Those messages are very powerful.

Christine Goodner ([07:17](#)):

Well, I always like to ask people what they learned, and we're touching on this already, the hard way about their practice through their own experience. So it sounds like you learned the hard way that you want to have joy incorporated and, you know, you don't have to spur yourself on, but with some of those negative self-talk, uh, messages. But what else would you say you had to learn the hard way that you hope to pass on to others?

Susanna Klein ([07:37](#)):

I mean, that's it in a nutshell, that that positivity can and must be cultivated. I, I think that's the big one for me, because I went from just chasing excellence to then chasing positivity just so that we would be less miserable to actually figuring out that so many things in playing depend on not being super, super negative. You know, physical tension is a huge one, almost any instrument, but particularly string instruments or voice depend on the body, releasing, relaxing, using our natural weight, you know, all these things that teachers say, right? That is incredibly difficult to do when a person is really negative or unhappy because all of that gets transferred. So what I found in my own life is that so many issues that I was struggling with, uh, on the violin started melting away naturally as I became more positive with myself. And that, that was a surprise because I, I certainly knew that I was making myself happier, but I didn't realize that I was also making myself a better player without extra hours in the practice room.

Susanna Klein ([08:50](#)):

Yeah. I guess the other thing that goes along with that, and I don't know if this will speak to parents, specifically, is that I think there, I think we think that certain personal qualities are good and certain ones are bad. And I don't think of it like that anymore. You know, through years of research, like every personality type or tendency has some great things regarding practice. It also has some challenges, right? And if we can learn to harness those and embrace those, that is so much better. So, as an example, I was trying to think before this interview, I don't teach small children anymore, but I did for, for decades, really. And I know one of the things that can be a real struggle for parents is when kids get easily distracted. But the thing is that the distraction part is really healthy. I know it can be difficult to manage, but it is, it is a, you know, it is that childlike curiosity where everything is potentially attractive, right?

Susanna Klein ([09:55](#)):

So it, it can seem like, like I used to have parents in lessons who would I think, get embarrassed when their kids start running all around the room and, oh, look at that picture and blah, blah. And they're, you know, Joey pay attention, you know, stay put. I think, you know, it embarrassed them a little bit. But the thing is that that that curiosity and that sort of mindset can be harnessed, right? So if somebody is easily distracted and you're having trouble with repetition, you can, for example, say, okay, you know, Joey, again, pick your hardest note in the, in the phrase, okay. They pick it and it's like, okay, let's just do that. And then whenever I say plus one or plus two or plus three, any kind of game you add so and so many notes before it or so, and so many notes after that, because they're into the game of it, sort of the thrill of what's gonna happen next.

Susanna Klein ([10:42](#)):

They, they love that, (pauses) I guess the not knowing what's coming next, you can literally play and make them practice better and observe more, right? So you can say, okay, plus one before, that means they have to play that note plus one before, and then you can say, okay, plus one before, plus two after, now they're practicing for notes, right? But it's very, I mean, this is good practicing. This would be good for me, and I'm a professional, you know, somebody who's very easily distracted. That can be a great asset in really digging deep and finding different ways of practice, just like we know, you know, patience is a virtue. There are certain things that we sort of say, okay, patience is great, distraction is not right. Or, being really shy is not good, right? But being outgoing right, is better, like for stage presence or something like that.

Susanna Klein ([11:35](#)):

And, you know, I found in my teaching, especially at the college level, like those introverts in my classes often have incredibly profound and well thought out things to say and a kind of calmness about them that the more extroverted students don't, you know, they might be first to speak, but it's not very well thought out. You know, they're impatient in a certain way because they're sort of hyper aware of the social aspect. So I, I think maybe that goes along with positivity, that there is a way to embrace all of it and utilize all of it rather than seeing certain things as the enemy of good practice and certain things as the allies of good practice.

Christine Goodner ([12:17](#)):

Oh, I love that. I think when we're the adult working with a young music student, thinking like that just helps take some of the tension out of the, the process. Because instead of just, I just always share, I

practice with my own daughter who's in her twenties now when she, you know, is a preschooler. And I just have thinking like, none of the things I'm told in teacher training are working with this child. Like, what's wrong with me? What's wrong with her? But, you know, shifting that perspective, which I learned the hard way too, like, okay, how do I help this child? Like you're saying, harness who they are.

Susanna Klein ([12:43](#)):

Yeah. And I think, you know, we have to be careful not only what we're taught about what virtuous means, right? What is a good practice or what is a good work hard at anything, but also kind of our own, our own narrative. I think we have to be careful of too. I, I know for sure that for me, you know, because I decided to go into music late, I was also a little bit of a late starter compared to other professional musicians. I had this inner story that was, I started late. It was really hard for me. Uh, so I shouldn't be here now. I could have easily turned that around, you know? And I've gone through this exercise later in my life, despite the fact that I started late and got serious late. I am a professional musician, so therefore I must be pretty talented.

Susanna Klein ([13:28](#)):

I mean, I would never really say that out loud, you know, I just said it, but do you know what I'm saying that could easily have, but that's not what I decided. What I decided was that I had this little source of shame. It takes me longer to learn music. I'm not as good of a sight reader, et cetera. But then when it came time for my kids to be, uh, in music, what did I do? Like my, my son started cello at three, and I was an aggressive practicer with him because I so much wanted to shield him from what I experienced, which was this sort of feeling of not belonging because I wasn't good very early on. He's a bass major now. It has all worked out. It has come full circle. But he quit cello, you know, when he was like 11.

Susanna Klein ([14:10](#)):

And I'm pretty sure it's 'cause I made him miserable, you know, I contributed to that and I was really trying to do the right thing, you know, I was being a good parent. So, you know, he then he later picked up electric bass, then he picked up upright bass, you know, then he got serious, and now he, then he told us he wanted to be a jazz major, and we were like, we didn't want that to happen. <laugh>. It, it's, it's, you know, it's our own personal stories as teachers, as parents, all of that stuff is in there.

Christine Goodner ([14:39](#)):

Right? And I think what we're both saying, but that I would like to highlight for parents and families listening is it's not that we're expecting less or not working hard or, you know, not trying to get as much done as we can. It's just how do we find some joy, or how do we all accept ourselves where we're at,

Susanna Klein ([14:54](#)):

Right? How do we build capacity? How do we keep stoking joy and awe and inspiration? You know, sometimes it's, it's, you'll have a bigger effect taking your kid to a live classical music event than you would with two weeks of, in getting with them in the practice room. There are other ways to cultivate those sparks, right. To keep them going. That, that makes it easier. Yeah. There, it's not good or bad, it's just, it's sort of being mindful of that edge. And sometimes I think not, uh, not walking in a brick wall, walk around it, you know?

Christine Goodner ([15:32](#)):

Yeah. I love that. And I love that when research sort of wraps up that it's not just, you know, feel good mushy stuff, which it can feel like sometimes that we're gonna be happy when we practice.

Susanna Klein ([15:42](#)):

No, no, not at all. Exactly. That's what I thought, you know, like positive self-talk, you know, like, okay, good luck with that. No, no. It's literally just finding little things. I, I know with my, younger son, I accidentally figured out that if I light a candle when he practices, he used to love to blow out candles. Like, that's simple act of, I light a candle. He practices, again, for a very short amount of time, because he was, I mean, talk about distraction kid. He, he was it, but then he got to blow the candle out at the end of the session, you know, that, that worked brilliantly for about six weeks. And then of course I had to move on to something else because the brain adapts to that. but that's so simple, right? Of sparking a little joy. Good job. You know, you get to blow out the candle. It's things like that. It's really not woowoo, you know, woowoo science kind of just tell yourself some positive story and you'll be fine. Right?

Christine Goodner ([16:39](#)):

Right. Yes. I think that's important because I think a lot of us come as skeptics to that idea, but then there's a lot of research that children will learn more when they're in a state of calm and they're not, you know, like we're saying tense or stressed. And so it's trying to cultivate, this is an environment where they can learn better, not just that, like some people say to be happy when you practice, but how do we put them in a state of learning? Right,

Susanna Klein ([16:58](#)):

Right. learning, exploring also, you know, changing it up every once in a while, or changing it up often, I would say. Yeah.

Christine Goodner ([17:06](#)):

So interesting. We could talk about this all day, <laugh>, but I, I do wanna talk about your resources - you have a great YouTube channel and a practice journal and resources about practice. I wonder if you could tell us a bit about those.

Susanna Klein ([17:17](#)):

So I have a YouTube channel. It's, uh, let's see, it's youtube.com/practice blitz, B-L-I-T-Z. Actually, those videos are also cataloged on my website, practizma.com that's kind of an ongoing project started at VCU, because I was making, I don't know if you do this too, like little practice videos for my students, you know, where I would demonstrate something. Usually it was a practice technique, and then I'm like, practice it like this, right? And then some students were sharing those with each other. Oh, well, she made this, you know, video on octaves, or she made this video and blah, blah, blah. You should, you know, watch this. And then once I sort of became privy to the fact that it was being shared, I was like, oh, maybe this is, you know, can be a resource for them. So at first it started really informally at school, and then I engaged, VCU, online learning.

Susanna Klein ([18:11](#)):

We have sort of a department that deals with videos and online learning and stuff to actually produce some of those, so I wouldn't have to do like the heavy lifting. And they're like, sure, you know, as long as you use them in your class, like, we'll be happy to, to do anything. And so then I kind of cataloged them,

and by theme, you know, if you're practicing vibrato, here are nine exercises. If you're working on playing fast, here are nine exercises. And they're supposed to be really short. And just give them different ideas. Because I, I guess I had thought that since in most of my lessons, I had said, oh, practice it like this, that, like, I didn't need to write 'em down any where, or I didn't need to demo them. But there is something to really seeing and believing because people forget, right?

Susanna Klein ([18:51](#)):

And it's like two years later and it's like, oh, I forgot about the, you know, if you're working on intonation, just play every other note to hear it in a different way and to keep yourself from being bored. Right? so that's one thing. Um, I have a practice journal, like a guided practice workbook. I would say that's probably for teenagers and above. It has a place to track their work, but it also has a weekly reflection, prompt <laugh>, something I'm asking them to, to write about, like, I don't know, describe your first experience in music or write down what makes practice hard for you, what makes it easy for you? And then it has a, it has an action prompt. You know, like this week play for three people, either in person, over Zoom on the phone, I don't care how you get it done, you know, do that. Uh, it's kind of for growth mindset and for growth building. that's the Pratzma practice journal. I blog a lot on Instagram, like little mini blogs, you know, just ideas about practice or truisms. They're not really my ideas. They're just something that happens to be true. And I, I try to say it out loud, more or less <laugh>.

Christine Goodner ([19:57](#)):

I think that's how I first connected with you. So I think that's great. Yeah,

Susanna Klein ([20:01](#)):

Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Exactly. I love, I love your Instagram, and it's not just for kids. It's like, everything you say is like, for all of us, you know?

Christine Goodner ([20:10](#)):

Oh, well thanks. Well, I feel the same. I really connected with yours and I think that maybe that's a place for parents to start if you feel like your child's not at that teen level yet, but just getting some little, I guess, encouraging ideas.

Susanna Klein ([20:20](#)):

Yeah. Little, little thoughts for the day or something. Yeah. I, I don't post as much as I should. I'm trying to get better, have better habits about that. But, uh, I, I try to just be regular. I'm gonna start with that because I feel regularity is like the bedrock, <laugh> of a, of a habit that later is maybe gonna become more serious. So, sure.

Christine Goodner ([20:41](#)):

And sometimes what's one thing I like to talk about is just if we're an adult practicing with a child, sometimes we need our own motivation and inspiration to like, okay, we're doing this again today.

Susanna Klein ([20:51](#)):

Yes. It's hard. It is hard. You know, when I was teaching little kids, I didn't have any little kids and oh, my inner dialogue was sometimes very ruthless. What's wrong with these people? You know, why can't they make, you know, consistent time? Like it's just, pick a time, stick to it, pick a room, you know? And then I

had my own kids and I was like, oh, oh, oh, oh!! Because then I was a working mom with two kids very close together with a career I was trying to play. It was, (pauses) it was impossible. You know? It was really, really, really difficult. And yeah, so often it's just also for our own inspiration, right? And our own, you know, going back to it positively and you know, you've fallen off the horse, it's okay, everybody falls off the horse. Like that's, that's normal. And then just getting back into it, you know, five minutes at a time or 10 minutes at a time, I think it's very important.

Christine Goodner ([21:46](#)):

Yeah. So I imagine if you're listening and you have a younger child, some of these resources might just help you, you know, think about how we could practice together. Here's some ideas. I can think of it from my side of things, because that is really, when you're guiding a young child through music, you are a really important part of the equation.

Susanna Klein ([21:59](#)):

Yeah. Just variety of ideas. And that's the, the same you'll see on the YouTube channel. You know, some of those things are more advanced techniques, but some of them, anybody can do. Right. Add a note backwards. You can do that in Suzuki book, one that doesn't, you don't have to be a professional or a, a college music student. And yeah, just, I mean, that's what I do to spark my own practice is that I feel like sometimes when I'm having difficulty getting into it, I will just watch a video. It could be of somebody playing or it could be a tutorial. I just need a new idea, a new, I'm bored, basically. I am bored <laugh> and I need some new, a little new shiny thing. And then I kind of, oh, I wanna try that out. I'm just curious, like, would it work? Does it work? And then before you know it, I'm practicing <laugh>, you know, and that's sort of what you want. You wanna slip into practice, not, you know, beat the door down, you know, with an elephant kind of thing.

Christine Goodner ([22:54](#)):

Yeah. I love that you said that. because even, even as professionals and <laugh>, you know, lifelong musicians, we, we need our own sparks.

Susanna Klein ([23:02](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. We all have the practice blues. Yeah. I mean, practice is hard. Practice is seriously hard, you know?

Christine Goodner ([23:09](#)):

Yeah. I love that. I, often talk with families about if, if it's hard practice is just feeling like a big ball of hard and how do you make it better? Like how do you start makes a big difference? And then how do you end practice makes a big difference.

Susanna Klein ([23:21](#)):

Yes. We know from research that people tend to remember their experiences by how they ended. So if you've ever gone to the beach for a week and it's rained the first half of the week and been sunny the second half, the way you come back and talk about that would be different than if it rained the first half of the week and was sunny the second half. Our whole inner dialogue is different. So ending is, is very how we end is very important. And, uh, don't do what I did, which is I only left the practice room or allowed my son Killian, for example, to leave the practice room when some serious, serious work, you

know, when all the work had been accomplished. Even if I was not feeling good, I was sick of it. I hated it. You know, I thought my job was to persist.

Susanna Klein ([24:05](#)):

And what I created, you know, over a lifetime with that kind of attitude is practice is hard, practice is horrible. I'm bad at it. I don't wanna do it. <laugh> I think beginnings and endings, I, I totally agree with you, is, is very, very important because, you know, practice is a party of one. It's very difficult. It's so incremental. It's problem focused, you know, it takes time and dedication every day. I mean, you're asking a child to do a very difficult thing, something that most adults can't do, right? Which is to be problem focused day in and day out, right? In this incremental, competitive, often very minutely focused activity. So we need to be cognizant of that. And, you know, if gamifying helps gamify, and I'm not just talking about the kids now. I'm also talking about, you know, music teachers and what gamify right?

Susanna Klein ([25:04](#)):

Get out a set of dice, roll the dice, and I don't know, let's, let's say could just be bar numbers, right? It's like you have two dice, all right, it's set of seven, let's practice bar seven. It says three practice bar three. And if bar three is easy, that's okay, go with it. Don't, don't say oh three is not very hard. We're gonna skip that one. No. Have the child feel a win. Like, ah, they tricked you. They're getting to repeat a really easy bar. That's okay, because a hard number will come up. Or you could do dice for, uh, slurs, practice all the, you know, the hard, I don't know the 16 notes, but we'll slur 'em slowly, exactly what the dice tells us. So if the dice says five, I mean slur five is pretty hard. That's okay. Even them failing trying to do it and laughing is success. 'cause the brain kind of regroups the notes when you're slurring. And so that's really good. So I'm a huge fan of gamifying and most of what the gamifying that I do in my studio with my young adult students is taken from Suzuki. You know, I take a chapter out of that book and I basically say, okay, we need to have some fun.

Christine Goodner ([26:12](#)):

Yeah. And, games at the end is a great way. Do you have any other ideas or things you use for yourself to finish off practice or suggest to your students?

Susanna Klein ([26:21](#)):

Yeah, I have a couple bowls of pinging pong balls in my office. I buy them like in bulk 'cause they're really cheap. And then I write little messages on them, you know, and so it could be like, like I have, I have a scale bowl. And so the scales will be like, you know, student picks a pinging pong ball out. 'cause it's supposed to be randomized, you know, that already makes them happy. And it'll say, play like a diva, but start PPP and, and end fortissimo at the top of the scale. Little things like that. Or slur two or only start from the top going down, like the highest note going down, things like that. So I have one sort of for, uh, scales. Um, I'll have another set of pinging pong balls for sort of fake performing, do you know what I mean? Like, okay, just do all the starts of your pieces, but nothing else but with the bow, that kind of stuff. Or some hard things like record yourself, you know, listen back with headphones. I mean those are a little bit further up, but I like to do that. Simon says something, I don't do it with my students, but I did it with my younger students and I did it with my kids. Is beads, did you ever use practice beads? Oh,

Christine Goodner ([27:28](#)):

It was counting. Yes.

Susanna Klein ([27:30](#)):

Yeah, the little moving over, you know, and the thing about that is that it's, that's based in all this research in psychology, which is that when we take a bigger goal and we put it into a more manageable little chunk, and you can see both the beginning and the end. It's very motivating and the brain releases dopamine as it's going. Wow. So what my kid's piano teacher did was for every year that he was old, we would go to the bead store and he would pick out the bead. That was very important. So when he was five, it was five beads that meant five repetitions and he moved them on the piano and when he was six, you know, et cetera, et cetera. So you're building your capacity to repeat, but you can also do goofy stuff. Like, you know, if you're a teacher and a kid is really off the wall distracted, they really just need to reconnect with you in the lesson.

Susanna Klein ([28:17](#)):

Tell them they can point to any piece in the music and you will play it for them two octaves up. They'll see you play at the top of the fingerboard. You might be playing badly, but that's okay that they love that. They think that's hilarious, right? Or you need to accompany them in the lesson without notes, which I, with my students do quite badly, but I still do it because they love it and it makes them laugh. Any kind of playing together I think is great. Any kind of inspiration from other games that they, like board games, cranium has like an all play. So it's like if you pick an art all play game, that would mean the parent would have to sing along with the kid. And parents, if you do that, please sing badly so that they are always the star. But things like that, I mean, basically I think my, my word of wisdom would be if you are struggling with practice or you wanna be a better er, a better practice parent, um, read some books that in psychology, even more than music, there's some incredible data out there about gamifying and making things surprising.

Susanna Klein ([29:18](#)):

Habit stacking, right? Like Atomic Habits is like a big habit book that will allow, it allowed me to exercise regularly for the first time, but it has also really helped me in coaching my students in, in organizing their practice time.

Christine Goodner ([29:32](#)):

So I'm glad you said that. I think there's some, some of us as adults who are coaching young students through music, we like to just go down the list and be efficient and get things done. And of course, many parents, which I relate to, just there's limited time and you feel this pressure to get the assignment done and it can feel like a waste of time, which I, you know, I, I don't agree with, but it can, we can see how it feels that way. Like can we just get through the list and we're getting out these game pieces and all this? Yeah.

Susanna Klein ([29:58](#)):

Right? Yes, exactly. It's the same reason, right? Why often I would just do things for my kids rather than ask them to do it, right? It's 'cause I just, I just needed it done. But you have to kind of, you, you have to be playing the long game. You know, do, do I wanna be doing my kids' laundry forever? No <laugh>, I want them to start doing their laundry. And even though in the beginning then, oh, and here's where you put the soap and just you think, I just wanna do it and practice is a little bit the same way. Do I want to be practicing with them forever and ever? No. So you start to be like, okay, it's mommy break for two minutes. I'm gonna let you do whatever you want without me, and then I'll come back and we'll get back

to serious work. Like it gives the kid a break, it gives you a break. There are ways, like that little tricky ways where you can play with these concepts and make them happier and you happier. Right?

Christine Goodner ([30:50](#)):

The goal is that they're going to be practicers on their own independently. And the, a big complaint I hear about new independent practices is, well, they just either stare at the stand and no music comes out or they play straight through over and over. And so I think all this that takes time and energy on our behalf when we're practicing with them will help.

Susanna Klein ([31:09](#)):

Yes. You know, it takes transitioning, purposefully transitioning and you're giving them the tools, right? So if it's like, okay, you know, as an example, okay, what, what do you think are the absolute hardest spots in this? Like, let's circle them. I'm a big fan of scratch copies of music so that the kids, or in this case my college students can, they can mark it up, I can mark it up, but it's not, it's not what they'll be reading off of. It's just like a play copy. Okay, let's circle 'em all. And it's like, you know, really daring a kid, okay, how long do you think you can last playing? Like as slowly as possible. Only those three spots. Do you know what I mean? Really like challenging them to do something. I used to call it a snails pace with my kid. And then, okay, you do that and as slowly as possible I will do the dishes and we'll both be like the slowest doers in the universe and then I'll come back so that it's not you're practicing with them and then one day they graduate and you're practicing not with them. You're still sort of guiding, prompting all that stuff, but you're starting to open that door,

Christine Goodner ([32:17](#)):

Right? And all these things that you've been talking about doing with the student is gonna help them actually know what to do when they get there. So I think it's so worth it to take that time, right. To play the games and you know, not just be efficient down the list because really we're teaching them, like you said, that long range, what skills do they need when I'm not in the practice room with them, work ourselves out job.

Susanna Klein ([32:34](#)):

No, every kid is different. Some, some kids need more gaming, some kids need less different personality types. I'm the personality type. If you tell me not to do it a certain way, then that's exactly what I wanna do. <laugh>. So I can be easily tricked into doing, doing something hard by you. Just tell me it's off limits and I wanna do it. Not everybody's like that, but, but I think parents have really good instincts about their kids and they kind of know sort of what works with their kids, right? Like I have, I have one kid who I have to be very careful not to suggest too much stuff because he, that will make him intractable, right? So I just said, well, well it's up to you. You know, we can take those parental insights and try to use 'em to our advantage.

Christine Goodner ([33:17](#)):

Yeah. And then ultimately then it's to our child's advantage because they're learning to work with themselves.

Susanna Klein ([33:22](#)):

Right? Right. Exactly. They're learning how to channel their own energy. I think things that I see overused are sort of the rewards system, right? If you practice this much and you practice really hard, I'll

give you a whatever. I've seen everything from iPhones to, um, you know, Xboxes to all sorts of very expensive lavish gifts, right? For a certain track record of whatever. I mean that does work, but it doesn't really build their own inner capacity to deal with some of the boredom and some of the challenges of practice that are still gonna be there after rewards are over. You know,

Christine Goodner ([33:55](#)):

That's a, it's tricky. It's tricky. Hats off to everyone out there practicing with their children.

Susanna Klein ([34:00](#)):

Totally, totally. And if you're a parent, you know, I mean, parenting is hard enough, but to be a practice parent is like hats off 1000%.

Christine Goodner ([34:11](#)):

Yeah. You're giving your child a huge gift.

Susanna Klein ([34:13](#)):

You are. And that gift does translate into so many things. I mean, even with my son Killian, you know, I was putting myself down earlier that I sort of ruined practice for him. I certainly did that with the cello. And then, you know, he took a break and then he found his own thing. But I do think that he relies on some of the things that we did so early on again and again and again. And also he knows that I'm a serious practicer. And so he will, he will come to me and be like, how, how do you deal with this? Or how do you, how do you stay motivated? Like you practice every day? Like how do you do that? You know, the, the skills are transferable to other things and they come back to those skills and they come back to you because you help them with it on some level.

Susanna Klein ([34:59](#)):

I think when my kids were growing up, I believed in the quantity parenting model, not the quality. Like I was never one of those parent like, okay, make it count and make the experience wonderful. And I just tried to kind of spend a lot of time with my kids so that they knew the door was open, they knew I cared about them. And, and that's it. And, and music does do that when you invest in an instrument, taking them to lessons, all that stuff that they see that you are doing things with them and for them. And even though a lot of times there can be friction, it's hard. It pays off. 'cause I think it's a huge relationship builder long term.

Christine Goodner ([35:39](#)):

Absolutely. And I'm glad you shared your story because it kind of came around full circle and none of us are going to do this perfectly. We're all gonna have moments where we're like, oh, I pushed too hard or I lost my temper. I wasn't patient because of stress.

Susanna Klein ([35:49](#)):

Oh yeah.

Christine Goodner ([35:50](#)):

Just, I think we can just reset things like use some of the ideas you're hearing here and you can always say like, oh, I'm sorry our practices have gotten tense. Let's you know, I'm going to try some new ideas or let's play some games. I think there's a way to repair that. Nothing is ruined

Susanna Klein ([36:02](#)):

All the time. We're constantly resetting. Right? And regret, regret is the big teacher in our lives, you know, there's nothing wrong with regret. Regret is awesome. I mean, it doesn't feel awesome obviously, but it is the thing that lets you know, oh, maybe I need, I need to find another way. I need to ask somebody else. I need to look up something. I need to try. I need to just try a different approach. See what works. It doesn't mean you failed, it means you are learning. That's what, that's what it means that that little bit of discomfort.

Christine Goodner ([36:30](#)):

Right. And I don't know if you would agree, but I've taught, you know, so many students over the years, I feel like every student who walks through the door has a slightly different combination of what they need to practice well and to work with them well. And so of course there's no one size fits all to the child in front of us that's our own child because every child's so different. We, we have to kind of learn along the way what what works with them. Yeah,

Susanna Klein ([36:49](#)):

Absolutely. And as teachers also, I used to really beat myself up about getting repertoire choices wrong for incoming freshmen. That was a big source of, oh, you know, I made it too easy. I made it too hard. I, you know, it took me a few years of yo-yoing through that cycle until I was like, oh, okay. First thing I do with freshmen is we do two very short pieces. Like very short because I don't know what I'm doing. Or put another way, I don't know them. Just because they played Bruck G Minor in their college audition doesn't mean they're actually literate in rhythm. Some of them aren't. Some of them are. Some of them work really hard, some of them, you know, work more occasionally, shall I say, everybody's different. And uh, it doesn't mean there's something wrong with me. It just means I don't know them very well.

Susanna Klein ([37:34](#)):

And until I know them better, I'm gonna proceed lightly and in small projects. Exactly. And kids change too. My son, uh, Raffie, he's a senior now. He had kind of a reading issue when he was younger. Hated to read, was slow in reading, flipped a lot of his letters. He got assessed. They said he wasn't dyslexic, but he had like a processing disorder. I mean, I was stressed about this. I just thought the world is gonna come to an end if my child is not a good reader again because of my own dialogue. 'cause reading is hard for me. And I wanted him not to experience that. And so thank God the person at his school said, you know, I think you should let him read with Audible going at the same time. And I was like, but isn't that cheating? And isn't that whatever?

Susanna Klein ([38:24](#)):

And how is he ever gonna learn to read? And, but I was like, okay, you're the expert, I'll go with that. So we did that and I don't know, then I sort of forgot about it. He, he was able to read. He was never a super fast reader and do you know what he wants to do now for a living? He's applying to college to be a writer. And I mean, if somebody had taught, he reads more than my other kid for sure, who was a voracious reader early on. He's reading all the time. He's reading during school assemblies, he's reading in the car, he's reading at the dinner table when I'm so who's like, can you put your book down? You

know, things change all the time. And I think that's, if I had one other message for parents, it's, you know, don't catastrophize know that things are changing on the ground all the time. Not just because of inborn biology, but because of the experiences that they have and you know, your job is to sort of accompany them on that journey. That's what I would tell my younger self is like, she lacks a little bit, either he's not gonna be a voracious reader or he will, but like world peace does not depend on whether my child is having an easy time reading.

Christine Goodner ([39:29](#)):

Yeah, absolutely. And we can, uh, you know, transfer that to practicing their instrument at the moment as well, <laugh>.

Susanna Klein ([39:36](#)):

Exactly, exactly. Whatever that, whatever that thing is.

Christine Goodner ([39:40](#)):

Sure. Yeah. Sometimes things that really challenge us when we overcome them, you know, become a big strength. So. Cool. I, I will share where people can find you on Instagram and YouTube and your practice journal, your website in our, in our show notes. And I just wanted to thank you for spending time with us today, sharing your insights into practice. And it's great to hear the research side of some of the things that I know to be true.

Susanna Klein ([40:02](#)):

Yeah. That you probably all intuitively are doing and teaching and like there's good reason for it. Yeah. and it's been great to be honest. I think a time spent talking about practice is always, it's good for me. You know, it's good for teaching my teaching my, my own practice. It's like the, the ability to reflect and be honest about it is, uh, time so well spent. It's like going to the psychologist, you know, it's awesome. Thank you so much.